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Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3128
INFO SECDEF
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COMUSSAG
CINCPAC
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY SAIGON
USUN NY 1357
AMEMBASSY PARIS

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 PHNOM PENH 10240

E.M. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, MOPS, CB
SUBJECT: OUTCOME OF THE BATTLE OF KOMPONG CHAM--A PRELIMINARY BALANCE SHEET

1. SUMMARY: ALTHOUGH IT WILL BE WEEKS BEFORE FINAL COUNT IS IN, OUR PRELIMINARY ASSESSMENT IS THAT THE BATTLE OF KOMPONG CHAM WAS ABOUT A DRAW ON THE MILITARY SIDE, A LOSS FOR THE GKR IN TERMS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DISLOCATION AND A CLEAR VICTORY FOR FANK PSYCHOLOGICALLY. THE TWO SIDES SEEM TO HAVE SACRIFIED ROUGHLY EQUAL NUMBERS OF MAIN FORCE TROOPS ALTHOUGH THE KI MAY FIND IT EASIER TO RECOUP THEIR PERSONNEL LOSSES. THE GKR LOST A GOOD PART OF THE CITY'S POPULATION AND ITS PRODUCTIVE CAPACITY, WHICH WILL LEAVE KOMPONG CHAM SMALLER AND POORER THAN IT WAS BEFORE. THE BIG STAKES AT KOMPONG CHAM WERE POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL, HOWEVER, AND ANY DOUBTS THAT THE VKR CAME OUT WELL AHEAD IN THIS RESPECT
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SHOULD BE DISSPELLED BY THE SOMEWHAT FRANTIC COVER-UP

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PROPAGANDA TO WHICH GRUNK/FUNK IS NOW RESORTING. END SUMMARY.

2. PSYCHOLOGICAL GAINS. THE STAKES AT KOMPONG CHAM WERE FROM THE OUTSET PRIMARILY POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL. THEY WERE SET BY THE KI, WHO BADLY NEEDED A CLEAR-CUT, MAJOR VICTORY TO REGAIN MOMENTUM LOST IN THE OFFENSIVE AROUND PHNOM PENH AND WHO WERE ALSO ANXIOUS TO OBTAIN AN ADDITIONAL BOOST FOR THEIR CREDENTIALS BATTLE AT THE UNITED NATIONS. THE KI APPARENTLY PLACED THESE STAKES ON KOMPONG CHAM BECAUSE IT IS ONE OF CAMBODIA'S BETTER KNOWN LOCALITIES BOTH HOME AND ABROAD, IT IS IDENTIFIED WITH THE CAREERS OF SEVERAL GKR LEADERS, IT IS CLOSE TO THE KI AND FAR FROM THE FANK SOURCES OF SUPPLY, AND THE FIRST MILITARY REGION'S RECORD ON ROUTE 7 PROMISED INEFFECTIVE OPPOSITION.

A. PSYCHOLOGICALLY, THE KI WOULD SEEM AT THIS POINT TO HAVE LOST MORE THAN THEY REALLY INTENDED TO RISK. NOT ONLY DID THEY FAIL TO LIVE UP TO THEIR LONG AND LOUD BOASTING BUT THEY LEFT BEHIND AT KOMPONG CHAM RATHER TELLING EVIDENCE AGAINST THEIR CLAIM TO BE LIBERATORS. (ALTHOUGH THE U.S. PRESS HAS YET TO FOCUS ON THIS ASPECT OF THE BATTLE, WE HAVE EYEWITNESS REPORTS OF THE EXECUTION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS, THE KILLING OF HOSPITAL PATIENTS, THE DEFROCKING OF MONKS; ETC., IN ADDITION TO THE WANTON DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY BY THE ATTACK ITSELF.) ALSO NOTEWORTHY IN THIS CONNECTION IS THAT, AS IN 1970, A NUMBER OF STUDENTS VOLUNTARILY JOINED IN THE DEFENSE OF THE CITY.

B. THE UNK/GRUNK THEMSELVES CONSIDERED KOMPONG CHAM A PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFEAT IS EVIDENCED BY THEIR ENERGETIC BUT VISIBLY DESPERATE COVER-UP PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN. NOT ONLY HAS SIHANOUK FELT IT NECESSARY TO REVISE HIS VICTORY TIMETABLE AND TO COMPLAIN THAT THE KI HAD BEEN CUT OFF FROM OUTSIDE ASSISTANCE WHILE FANK CONTINUED TO RECEIVE U.S. AID, BUT THE KI HAVE NOW RESORTED TO THE BIG LIE, ALLEGING THAT U.S. AIRCRAFT HAD AN IMPORTANT AND BRUTAL ROLE IN KOMPONG CHAM'S DEFENSE.

C. SOME QUALIFICATIONS MUST, OF COURSE, BE PLACED ON FANK'S PSYCHOLOGICAL VICTORY. A FEW KHMER, ESPECIALLY DISGRUNTLED PHNOM PENH STUDENTS, HAVE POINTED OUT THAT THE ARMY DID NOT PREVENT THE KI FROM CARRYING OFF A GREAT PORTION OF THE CITY'S POPULATION AND THE HUMAN COSTS OF THE BATTLE IN TERMS OF CIVILIAN CASUALTIES AND REFUGEES HAVE BEEN WIDELY VISIBLE. ALSO, SOME FANK UNITS APPEAR TO HAVE

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ENGAGED IN SMALL SCALE LOOTING AND PROFITEERING. ON BALANCE, HOWEVER, FANK SHOWED THE NATION AND ITSELF THAT IT COULD RESPOND FORCEFULLY TO A MAJOR THREAT AT THE PERIPHERY OF ITS TERRITORY AND THAT IT COULD FIGHT WITH ITS BACK AGAINST THE WALL. A DEMONSTRATION OF THIS SORT WAS BADLY NEEDED.

D. THE MOST STRIKING PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF KOMPONG CHAM TO DATE HAVE BEEN PERHAPS ON MILITARY MORALE. THE NAVY IN PARTICULAR IS RIGHTFULLY PROUD OF ITSELF. ITS NEW CONFIDENCE, WHICH WAS MOST RECENTLY EVIDENCED IN THE PREY VENG OPERATION, SHOWS SOME SIGN IN FACT OF EXCEEDING PROPER BOUNDS AS NAVY LEADERS NOW SPEAK OF SAILING TO KRATIE. THE ARMY TOO HAS BEEN GIVEN A BOOST, AND WE ARE TEMPTED TO ATTRIBUTE THE RECENT OPENING OF ROUTES 1 AND 4 IN SOME DEGREE TO A DESIRE NOT TO BE OUT-DONE BY THE KOMPONG CHAM BRIGADES. MOST IMPORTANT, PERHAPS, THE SUCCESSFUL JOINT NAVY-AIRFORCE-ARMY OPERATION AT KOMPONG CHAM HAS STRENGTHENED HERETOFORE WEAK INTER-SERVICE BONDS.

E. WE NOW HAVE CONSIDERABLE EVIDENCE THAT KOMPONG CHAM HAS HAD REVERSE EFFECTS ON ENEMY MORALE AND ATTITUDES. SEVERAL RELIABLE SOURCES HAVE REPORTED KI FEUDS WITH THEIR VIETNAMESE ALLIES AND THE UNWILLINGNESS OF KI UNITS BORROWED FROM OTHER REGIONS TO REMAIN. THE TONE OF SIHANOUK'S RECENT STATEMENTS ALSO CAN BE TAKEN AS AN INDICATION THAT THIS MORALE PROBLEM HAS RISEN TO THE HIGHEST POLITICAL LEVELS.

3. MILITARY LOSSES. AS KOMPONG CHAM HAS LITTLE STRATEGIC IMPORTANT FOR THE ENEMY, THE MILITARY STAKES WERE PRIMARILY THE FORCES COMMITTED TO THE BATTLE. AFTER SUBSTANTIAL INITIAL LOSSES OF TERRITORIAL TROOPS FANK RAISED THESE

STAKES TO THE POINT THAT A DEFEAT AND DISORGANIZED WITH-DRAWAL WOULD HAVE BROUGHT INTO QUESTION ITS ABILITY TO REMAIN THE THE GAME. THIS GAMBLE PAID OFF AND, AS OF TODAY, WE ESTIMATE MILITARY LOSSES TO BE AT LEAST BALANCED AND PERHAPS IN FANK'S FAVOR ALTHOUGH THE KI IS IN A MUCH BETTER POSITION TO RECOUP PERSONNEL LOSSES.

A. NUNERICALLY FANK'S LOSSES WERE GREATEST AMONG THE TERRITORIAL UNITS. WE DO NOT HAVE ACCURATE FIGURES BUT ESTIMATED SOME 1,000 MEN FROM THESE UNITS DISAPPEARED, A FEW OF WHOM WERE KILLED, MANY OF WHO DESERTED AND MOST OF WHOM WERE PROBABLY CAPTURED. MORE MEANINGFUL IN TERMS OF EFFECT ON FANK'S OVERALL STRENGTH WERE CASUALTIES IN THE MAJOR INTERVENTION FORCE UNITS.

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3129
INFO SECDEF
CJCS
COMUSSAG
CINCPAC
AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
AMEMBASSY SAIGON
USUN NY 1358
AMEMBASSY PARIS

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OF THE 4,675 MEN IN THE FOUR BRIGADES, 215 HAVE THUS FAR
BEEN LISTED AS KILLED, 1,320 AS WOUNDED AND 76 AS MISSING.
WE BELIEVE THAT OVER 50 PERCENT OF THE WOUNDED HAVE RETURNED
OR WILL SOON BE ABLE TO RETURN TO THEIR UNITS. ONE
FANK BATTALION COMMANDER WAS KILLED. UNLIKE SOME WESTERN
JOURNALISTS, WE WOULD NOT DESCRIBE THESE AS CRITICAL LOSSES
FOR THE GENERAL RESERVE BUT THEY ARE SERIOUS AND THEY DO POINT
TO THE NEED FOR A MORE VIGOROUS RECRUITMENT PROGRAM.
B. MR I COMMANDER SAR HOR HAS ESTIMATED KI KILLED IN
ACTION AT 2,000 INCLUDING ONE BATTALIION COMMANDER. WE
HAVE NO MEANS OF VERIFYING HIS ESTIMATED BUT WOULD NOT
REJECT A FIGURE OF THIS MAGNITUDE FOR THE TOTAL NUMBER
OF ENEMY TROOPS PUT OUT OF ACTION.
C. EQUIPMENT LOSSES WERE, AS MIGHT BE EXPECTED, IN THE
KI'S FAVOR BUT NOT MARKEDLY SO. FANK LOST ONE AU-24
STALLION GUNSHIP DESTROYED, THREE 105MM HOWITZERS
BADLY DAMAGED AND NINE ANCIENT ARMORED CARS (ALL EITHER
BELIEVED MARGINALLY OPERATIVE OR INOPERATIVE). FANK

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CAPTURED 115 ASSORTED WEAPONS INCLUDING EIGHT
CREW-SERVICED WEAPONS, AND DESTROYED ONE OF THE FOUR
105 MM HOWITZERS BELIEVED TO BE IN THE ENEMY'S
POSSESSION.
D. WHILE THE OVERALL FIGURES SEEM TO BE SLIGHTLY IN
FANK'S FAVOR, IT SHOULD BE NOTED THAT THE KI IS IN A
BETTER POSITION TO RECOUP ITS PERSONNEL LOSSES OVER
THE LONGER TERM. INDEED, ITS INITIAL PENETRATION INTO
KOMPONG CHAM ALLOWED IT TO ROUND UP PROBABLY TWICE THE
NUMBER OF ELIGIBLE MALE CIVILIANS THAN THE MILITARY IT
LOST.

4. SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC COSTS. IT IS AS YET IMPOSSIBLE TO
QUANTIFY ACCURATELY THE SOCIAL DISLOCATION AND ECONOMIC
DESTRUCTION CASUED BY THE BATTLE OF KOMPONG CHAM BUT WE
CAN SAFELY SAY THE FIGURES WILL BE HIGH.
A. UP TP 30 OR 40 THOUSAND CIVILIANS WERE ABDUCTED.
SEVERAL SOURCES TELL US THAT THEY WERE RAPIDLY SEPARATED
INTO GROUPS WITH YOUNG MEN AND WOMEN SENT TO THE EAST
BANK OF THE MEKONG FOR INDOCTRINATION AND MILITARY TRAIN-
ING, MONKS EITHER DEFROCKED AND INTEGRATED INTO THE
MILITARY TRAINING CADRES OR PLACED IN PAGODAS IN THE
ENEMY ZONE, AND OLD MEN AND WOMEN RELEASED TO RETURN TO
KOMPONG CHAM. PSYCHOLOGICAL COSTS ASIDE, THIS ACQUISITION
OF HUMAN RESOURCES WOULD JUSTIFY THE ENEMY'S OUTLAY IN
THIS BATTLE.
B. KOMPONG CHAM'S CIVIL ADMINISTRATION HAS BEEN LEFT
IN SHAMBLES. OF 100 CIVIL SERVANTS IN THE PROVINCIAL ADMINIST-
RATIVE OFFICE, FOR EXAMPEL, ONLY ONE, THE DEPUTY GOVERNOR,
WAS PRESENT FOR DUTY ON SEPTEMBER 21.
SIXTY WERE REPORTEDLY CAPTURED BY
THE ENEMY, 20 FLED TO PHNOM PENH AND THE REMAINDER WERE
AFRAID TO VENTURE TO THEIR OFFICES BECAUSE OF SHELLING.
OF 200 SECONDARY TEACHERS ABOUT 145 CAN CURRENTLY BE
ACCOUNTED FOR AND 1200 OF THE 2000 ELEMENTARY TEACHERS
ARE MISSING. THE ENTIRE STAFF OF DOCTORS IN THE CIVILIAN
HOSPITAL DISAPPEARED AND IS NOT YET ACCOUNTED FOR.
C. THE BATTLE OF KOMPONG CHAM HAS ADDED ABOUT 7,500
PEOPLE TO PHNOM PENH'S ALREADY ENORMOUS REFUGEE POPULATION.
THIS NUMBER WOULD HAVE BEEN MUCH GREATER HAD THE FIRST
MILITARY REGION COMMANDER NOT RESTRICTED PERMISSION TO
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LEAVE LARGELY TO MILITARY AND CIVIL GOVERNMENT DEPENDENTS.
ESTIMATES OF THE NUMBER OF REFUGEES IN KOMPONG CHAM
RANGE FROM 25,000 TO 40,000 BUT OFFICIALS AS YET ADMIT

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THEY HAVE ONLY VAGUE IDEAS OF THE POPULATION REMAINING
IN THE CITY (ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE PLANS FOR A CENSUS).
VIRTUALLY ALL THE REMAINING POPULATION ARE
LIVING AT THE MOMENT IN REFUGEE-LIKE CONDITIONS AS THEY
ARE CRAMMED INTO WATERFRONT BUILDINGS (UP TP TEN
FAMILIES IN A SINGLE APARTMENT) TO ESCAPE SHELLINGS.
THIS PROBLEM WILL BE GREATLY ALLEVIATED, OF COURSE,
IF FANK FORCES ARE ABLE TO EXPAND THE DEFENSE PERIMETER
AND FAMILIES ARE ALLOWED TO MOVE INTO NOW DESERTED
QUARTERS OF THE CITY.
D. INITIAL ECONOMIC DISLOCATION HAS, OF COURSE, BEEN
SEVERE. ALTHOUGH SUFFICIENT RICE EXISTS IN GOVERNMENT
STOCKS (ABOUT 540 TONS ON SEPTEMBER 21) TO FEED THE
CITY FOR ABOUT A MONTH, MONEY TO PURCHASE IT WITH IS
REPORTEDLY SCARCE. ONLY 40 TONS HAVE BEEN SET ASIDE
FOR DISTRIBUTION TO REFUGEES. VEGETABLES, USUALLY
PLENTIFUL IN KOMPONG CHAM, ARE NOW IN VERY SHORT
SUPPLY BUT WILL PROBABLY RETURN TO THE MARKET IF FANK
FORCES ARE ABLE TO EXTEND THER PERIMETER ALONG THE
BANKS OF THE MEKONG AND LAKES. IN SUM, THE PROBLEM
OF FEEDING, HOUSING AND CARING FOR THE REMAINING POPULA-
TION OF KOMPONG CHAM IS GREAT BUT CAN BE SURMOUNTED IF
AND WHEN THE PERIMETER IS ENLARGED, VOLUNTARY AGENCIES'
PROGRAMS GET UNDERWAY AND THE GKR HAS GOT ITS ADMINISTR-
TIVE ORGANS BACK INTO WORKING ORDER.
E. THE PERMANENT ECONOMIC COSTS OF THE BATTLE OF
KOMPONG CHAM ARE MOST DIFFICULT TO MEASURE. WE DO
NOT YET KNOW THE EXTENT OF THE DAMAGE TO THE TEXTILE
PLANT, THE LARGEST OF CAMBODIA'S THREE. IF IT CANNOT
BE BROUGT
BACK INTO OPERATION, HOWEVER, THE TEXTILE
INDUSTRY WILL NOT ONLY HAVE LOST THE OUTPUT OF THIS
PLANT BUT THE PRODUCTION OF THE OTHER FACTORIES IN PHNOM
PENH AND BATTAMBANG WILL BE REDUCED FOR LACK OF
SPECIALIZED PRODUCTS PRODUCED ONLY AT KOMPONG CHAM.
WE HAVE NOT YET BEEN ABLE TO MAKE AN ASSESSMENT OF
DAMAGE TO THE CITY'S BASIC SERVICES AND THE POSSIBILITY
OF BRINGING THEM BACK TO PRE-ATTACK LEVEL. IF FANK
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FORCES ARE ABLE TO EXTEND THEIR PERIMETER TO THE POINTS
NOW ENVISAGED (AT BEST A 10-12 KM SEMI-CIRCLE CENTERED
ON TOWN-AT WORST AN ARC ENCOMPASSING THE AIRFIELD)--
AND WE BELIEVE THEIR CHANCES OF DOING SO ARE GOOD--THE
LONG TERM PROSPECTS FOR FEEDING THE CITY WILL NOT BE
BAD. CONSIDERING THE LOSS OF POPULATION, IMPORTS OF
RICE WOULD IN THIS CONTINGENCY PROBABLY NOT EXCEED
PRE-ATTACK LEVELS.
F. IN SHORT, KOMPONG CHAM WILL UNDER THE BEST CONDITIONS
BE A MUCH SMALLER AND POORER CITY THAN IT WAS BEFORE.

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WE BELIEVE IT WILL BE A PROUD ONE, HOWEVER, AND AN IMPORTANT SYMBOL OF THE NATIONS'S WILL TO RESIST.
ENDERS

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